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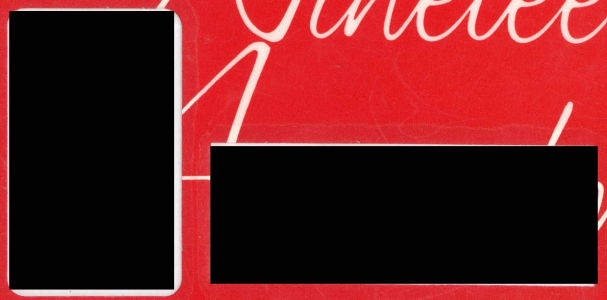
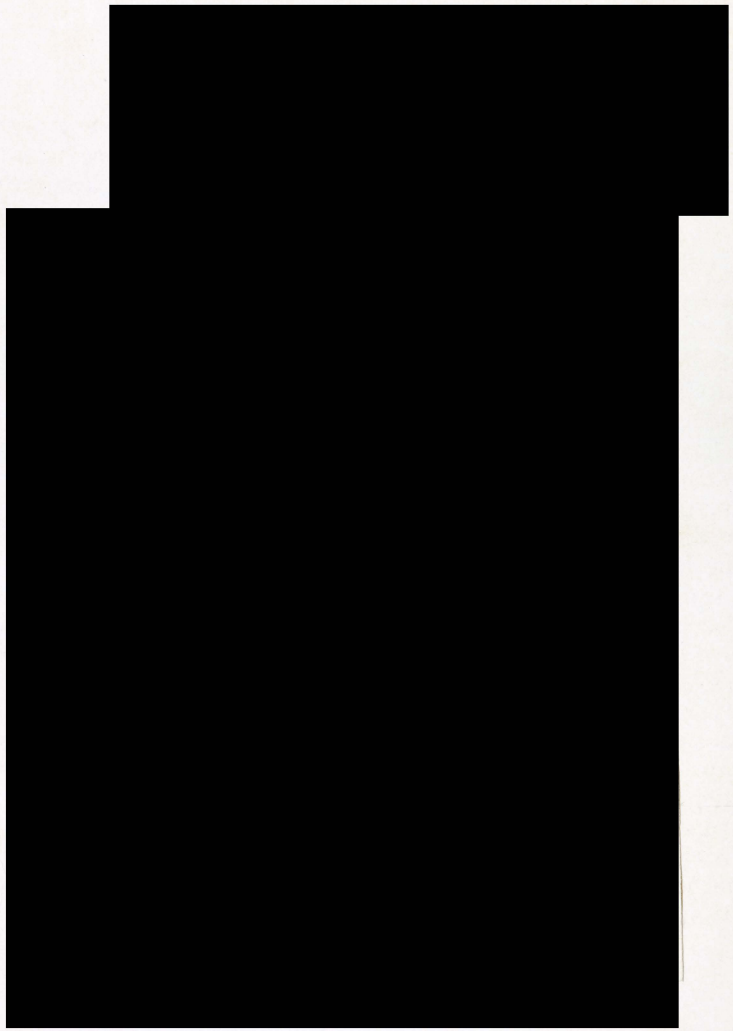
THE WOMEN'S VOTE:

Beyond the Nineteenth [redacted]ment



League of Women Voters Education Fund



This publication was written by Mary Stone, Marlene Cohn and Matthew Freeman of the LWVEF Government/Voters Service Department.

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PREFACE

Following the 1982 election, considerable press and public attention focused on the "gender gap" or the "women's vote"—an emerging pattern in elections that reveals how women and men have come to differ as voters in their political preferences and voting choices. According to election experts who have long studied and researched voting behavior, a differentiated "women's vote" is a relatively recent phenomenon, although trends were apparent before 1980—the watershed year for the women's vote. Only in 1982, however, did the phenomenon begin to receive the widespread public media notice that such a marked trend deserves.

Experts agree that these gender-based differences between men and women voters are long-term. It is therefore important that the women's vote and the implications of the gender gap be closely examined. Political and economic leaders need to understand what the issue differences and voting pattern differences are between men and women voters and what these differences mean for politics in the United States.

The League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF), believing that the women's vote is a critically important feature of the sociopolitical landscape, convened a Conference on the Women's Vote in June 1983, funded in part by contributions from the Windom Fund and the George Gund Foundation. Participants included leaders of more than 40 organizations who were drawn by a common desire to learn more about the women's vote and motivated to plan and strategize together about ways to increase voter registration and electoral participation among women. Participants heard noted scholars and polling experts discuss the women's vote and what it means.

This publication summarizes the key research findings presented at the conference, presents other information as well and concludes with a discussion of what the women's vote may mean for the future.

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1980s, several voting patterns among women showed marked change. The presidential election year of 1980 was the first in which the proportion of women voting was equal to that of men, a pattern that was repeated in 1982. The early 1980s also saw identifiable differences in how women voted compared to men and in why they made the voting choices they did. In 1982, political commentators began using the phrase "gender gap," as gender differences on issue preferences and partisan leanings continued in significant degree. And as the 1984 presidential campaign warmed up, the gender gap continued to be a widely noticed and discussed new facet of American electoral behavior.

The reasons for the gender gap are many and complex, but some obvious connections come to mind. Inspired by the protest marches and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) ratification battles of the 1970s, many women, perhaps for the first time, have seen the political process up close and have recognized the importance of voting. Moreover, the increase in the number of women in the work force and in the number of single-parent families has meant that many women began to clearly perceive their stake in the political process. Another factor contributing to increased voting proportions by women was the decreased numbers in the voting-age population of women born and reared before the vote was granted to women or reared in families that frowned on women's participation in politics. The sheer numbers of women (53 percent) in the voting-age population and the increased turnout of women at the polls have resulted in a political fact of great significance. In 1980, there were six million more women voters than men voters, even though similar percentages of each gender voted. The proportion of each gender voting in 1982 continued to be approximately equal, meaning again that, in real numbers, more women than men were in the voting public. As the import of the statistics became understood, candidates, campaigners, scholars and the media became intrigued—or concerned—as the case may be, about the women's vote. It began to be factored into political equations and considered in political strategy decisions. Following is a look at the forces that led to this gender gap and a discussion of its roots and its manifestations.

ANTECEDENTS OF THE GENDER GAP

An understanding of women's voting behavior must begin with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment; for only against the backdrop of the enfranchisement of women in the United States can the full scope of the change in women's voting patterns be appreciated.

In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified by the requisite 36 states, after passing Congress in 1919. The amendment says:

> *The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.*

Capping three-quarters of a century of struggle for the women's franchise, the Nineteenth Amendment was an epoch-marking event in the history of American women. The excitement and challenge of that moment are evident in a passage from a letter that suffragist leader Carrie Chapman Catt wrote to new women voters in 1920:

> The vote is the emblem of your equality, women of America, the guaranty of your liberty. That vote of yours has cost millions of dollars and the lives of thousands of women. Money to carry on this work has been given usually as a sacrifice, and thousands of women have gone without things they wanted and could have had in order that they might help get the vote for you. Women have suffered agony of soul which you never can comprehend, that you and your daughters might inherit political freedom. That vote has been costly. Prize it!
>
> The vote is a power, a weapon of offense and defense, a prayer. Understand what it means and what it can do for your country. Use it intelligently, conscientiously, prayerfully. No soldier in the great suffrage army has labored and suffered to get a "place" for you. Their motive has been the hope that women would aim higher than their own selfish ambitions, that they would serve the common good.
>
> The vote is won. Seventy-two years the battle for this privilege has been waged, but human affairs with their eternal change move on without pause. Progress is calling to you to make no pause.[1]

[1]Carrie Chapman Catt, a noted suffragist leader, was president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association until 1920. The League of Women Voters was born at the Association's final convention. The LWV was created to teach women about public affairs and to encourage them to use the franchise. Catt's letter is quoted in Mary Gray Peck, *Carrie Chapman Catt* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1924).

Participants at the League of Women Voters Education Fund's Conference on the Women's Vote listen as Dr. Barbara Farah of the University of Michigan reviews the data showing an electoral gender gap in the 1982 election.

The bright promise of these stirring words was not translated into widespread voting and political participation by women in the years following 1920, however. Rather, a much different trend emerged: after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, only a small number of newly enfranchised women registered and voted. Charles Merriam and Harold Gosnell, political scientists who studied nonvoting trends in the 1920s in Chicago, found women's early voting rates lagging far behind those of men. They estimated that only about a third of the eligible female voting-age population turned out to vote in the 1923 mayoral election in Chicago, while the voter turnout rate for men was almost twice as high. Even though women voters had influenced the outcomes of some state elections before 1920 in those few states in which they could vote, the overall performance of women voters in the 1920s fell considerably below expectations.

There are a number of possible reasons for this low initial turnout among women. Some attribute the low participation rate to the inability of some local election officials to absorb and manage the increased number of voters. The amendment was, after all, ratified only two and a half months before the 1920 election. The low national turnout for women can also be partly attributed to election practices in southern states that often depressed minority turnout, both male and female. These administrative obstacles to voting included poll taxes, literacy tests, lengthy residence requirements, frequent reregistration requirements and the like. Cultural patterns also dampened participation rates for many women, especially in the South. Western women, on the other hand, were apparently more likely to vote than other women, for they had been voting in many western states for some time. Some experts say that frontier life may have had an equalizing impact that encouraged women's voting participation in the West.

However, inept or discriminatory election procedures and regional customs cannot totally explain the low voter participation rates for

women in the 1920s. Voting was a new experience and a new responsibility for women and, according to many experts, not all women felt comfortable about exercising this right. Women associated with the suffrage movement voted, but others not accustomed to thinking of themselves as political persons tended to hold back. Many women, as well as many men, also thought politics was not an appropriate arena for women—an attitude that lingered for many years. (It should be noted that the voting rates for any group entering the electorate are initially low, whether it be women, minorities or young people.)

During the 1920s, class-based factors may have affected voter turnout for some women. The Merriam-Gosnell study of nonvoting found that in Chicago in 1923 (which at that time kept voting records by sex), native American women, particularly those well-off economically, voted at rates very close to those of their male counterparts. The voting rates for immigrant women in ethnic neighborhoods, however, were drastically lower than those for men. Cultural patterns, disinterest or fear of embarrassment apparently kept naturalized women from going to the polls. All in all, the 1920s were a disappointment to the champions of women's voting rights who had invested their hopes in a new empowerment of women through the ballot box.

The New Deal brought some improvement in female voter turnout as women were apparently attracted by the issues of high priority to the Roosevelt administration. In spite of this interest, however, male-female differences in voter participation remained significant until well after World War II. In 1948, for example, the turnout rate for women lagged 13 percentage points behind the rate for men. By the 1952 and 1956 elections, there was only a 10-point lag between men and women. This gap in turnout continued to narrow into the 1960s and 1970s, and by the 1980 presidential election, there was virtually no gender-based difference in voter turnout, as Figure 1 shows.

During a panel discussion of coalition efforts and individual organization activities on the women's vote, Debra Livingston reported on a voter registration project conducted in 1982 by the National Association of Social Workers. Other members of the panel included, from left to right, Judy Goldsmith, president of the National Organization for Women; Bella Abzug, secretary of the Women USA Fund; and Kathy Wilson, president of the National Women's Political Caucus.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE VOTER TURNOUT

Political scientist Marjorie Lansing, a speaker at the LWVEF Conference on the Women's Vote, and coauthor Sandra Baxter have written the highly respected and comprehensive *Women and Politics: The Visible Majority*.[2] Their study describes the changing voting pattern for women and men in the eight presidential elections since 1952 and points up interesting trends in subcategories of the female population.

Education—Social scientists find education generally is the single most powerful predictor of voter turnout for both men and women (i.e., it is the socioeconomic characteristic most highly correlated with voting). Higher levels of education are more closely associated with voter participation particularly among women. The Lansing-Baxter study shows that over a 25-year period, college-educated women have voted at the highest rates and that the rate for this group does not fluctuate as much as those of other women. Grade-school or high-school educated women are possibly more subject to the effect of different candidates and various campaign issues in different election years, and their turnout rates show more fluctuation.

Employment—Lansing and Baxter also found that women employed outside the home have made a great improvement in their voter turnout rate over time. Women in the 1980s represent approximately 40.8 percent of the total work force, and apparently employment has become a powerful motivator for their political participation. But among working women (and 49.3 percent of women work outside the home), there are significant differences. The highest voter participation rate is evident among professionally employed women. Up until 1980 the next highest participation rate was among clerical and sales women employees, but in 1980 this group was surpassed by homemakers. Women in blue collar jobs have remained at the lowest turnout levels.

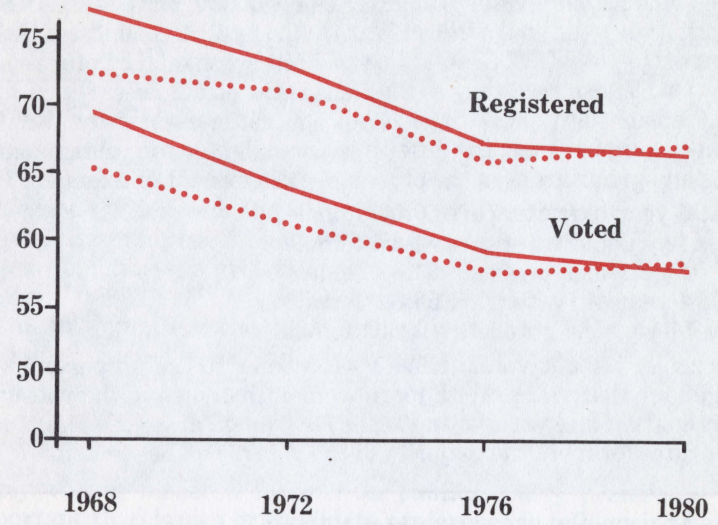
Region—Geographic region also plays a role in voter turnout. Census Bureau reports show that southern women are less likely to vote than women who live in the northeastern, western, or north central regions of the country, although the voter turnout rate for southern women improved from 1976 to 1980. Women in the north central states consistently have the highest turnout rate. In 1976, northeastern women had the second highest rate, followed by western women, but in 1980, these two categories changed places.

Race—Lansing told the LWVEF Conference that race can influence voter turnout—but, for black women at least, not always as one would expect. Since the 1960s, black women have voted at rates similar to or even higher than those of black men. As Lansing and Baxter have stated, "White women have taken longer than black women to reach voting rates

[2]Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Revised edition, 1983.

FIGURE 1

Percent of Men and Women Who Reported Registering and Voting in Presidential Elections*



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.
Compiled by the League of Women Voters Education Fund.

*Both Census Bureau studies and other surveys of voting behavior based on interviews have found that citizens in interviews tend to "overreport" their voting or registration rates, by as much as 5–15 percent. Speculation is that norms of democracy and patriotism make some citizens uncomfortable about saying they did not vote, so they report they did. Others may not remember. For example, in 1980, the actual average turnout rate for all voters was 53.2 percent of the voting-age population.

comparable to those of their respective men." Also, they point out that in 1976 black women with an elementary school education voted at rates 5–11 percentage points higher than their white female counterparts. Since they vote at rates greater than their socioeconomic background would predict, Lansing suggests that the motivation for these black women to vote is undoubtedly strong, even though many may be economically disadvantaged. (Citizens at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum generally tend to vote at lower rates, a characteristic intensified

A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS

All discussion of voter turnout differences between men and women should rest on an understanding of an important demographic fact: since 1964, women have outnumbered men in the *numbers* of eligible persons who actually vote. Women have been a majority of the U.S. population since the end of World War II, and by 1982 constituted 51.3 percent of the total U.S. population and 52.8 percent of the voting-age population (VAP), according to the Census Bureau figures.

The census data show that, in all age categories of the VAP, women outnumber men; the differences are slight in the younger age groups and grow larger in the older age categories. For example:

18–20-year-old voters are 50.5% female
35–44-year-old voters are 51.4% female
45–54-year-old voters are 51.8% female
65–74-year-old voters are 56.6% female
over 74-year-old voters are 63.4% female

Discussions about voter turnout *rates* refer to the proportion of each gender that votes. With more women than men in the voting-age population and with voting rates for women at least as high as voting *rates* for men, the majority of the voters will be women.

when combined with minority status.) Further research is needed to determine the reasons for atypical participation rate for black women.

Age—Age also affects voter turnout for women, with the highest levels of participation occurring between the ages of 31 and 60. The next highest voting rate is found in the 61 and over age group (although in 1980, the differences between the two groups were not great), with the 18–30-year-old category participating at the lowest rate.

While all of the factors described above can influence voter participation for both women and men, these factors can combine in various ways to affect different individuals. Until 1980, education had been by far the most important correlate of turnout for women, with age running a close second. Region and employment status were not highly predictive. In 1980, age and employment surpassed education as the best predictors, with education and region coming next, according to the Baxter-Lansing study.

Voter turnout is thus related to various demographic characteristics of voters. But an understanding of the act of voting also requires some attention to voters' attitudes and opinions as well.

THE WOMEN'S VOTE COMES OF AGE

What made news in 1980 and 1982 was that, for many women, voting choices and political preferences were distinctly different from the choices made by men. Consequently, as the 1984 presidential campaign period heated up, speculation about the gender gap or the women's vote became a common topic in the media. Democratic candidates appearing before the fall 1983 convention of the National Organization for Women were asked to respond to the idea of a woman as a vice-presidential candidate. Republicans speaking at the 1983 National Federation of Republican Women conference discussed the importance of recruiting more Republican women to run for congressional and senatorial seats. Political cartoonists began depicting the growing political power of women voters. In short, the gender gap had "arrived." But what did it really mean? A look at some trends in women's voting decisions can give us a basis for understanding the long-term forces at work in the gender gap of the 1980s.

PARTISAN DIFFERENCES

Early voting research focused on political party preference as more important than issues or candidate preference in influencing how people voted when they went to the polls. Even though party affiliation seems to have lost some of its influence in recent years, for many it is still a vital factor in the process of deciding for whom to vote. Even those who may insist that they vote for "the candidate, not the party" often use party identification as a shortcut for making their decision, absent other influences.

Scholars have found that historically, men's and women's partisan preferences did not differ greatly, although in the 1950s (and earlier) women were slightly more likely than men to be Republican. By the 1970s and certainly in the 1980s, however, this pattern had shifted. In 1976, a greater proportion of women identified themselves as Democrats than men (by 5 percentage points, 53 percent to 48 percent), and these differences continued in the 1980 and 1982 elections.

The 1980 election results again showed a clear difference in party preference between men and women. As Marjorie Lansing pointed out at the LWVEF Conference on the Women's Vote, women expressed a preference 6 percentage points higher than men for the Democratic party and a preference 4 percentage points lower than men for the Republican party. These preferences carried through the 1982 elections as well.

In 1982 pollsters, politicians and the media carefully eyed the newly named "gender gap." Preelection polls tracked a consistent significant gap between male and female "likely voters," both in their approval/disapproval of the way President Reagan was handling his job and on their likely vote in the '82 congressional elections. The consistent preelection

differences between men and women led many to expect that the women's vote would be one of the critical factors in the 1982 elections.

Actual results were mixed at the national level but more significant at the state level. And, the male/female partisan differences were noteworthy. According to the CBS News/*New York Times* national exit poll on election day, in the 1982 elections for the U.S. Congress, 57 percent of women voters preferred Democratic candidates, compared to 53 percent of men voters. The gap was even greater in other national polls: the ABC exit polls, for example, showed women preferring Democratic candidates by 5 points more than men; NBC polls showed a six-point difference. Kathleen Frankovic, surveys director for CBS News, told the LWVEF Conference on the Women's Vote that analysis of exit poll data in 1982 suggested that gender might be a better predictor of voting behavior than some other characteristics for that election.

In the spring of 1983, University of Michigan social scientists reported on a study of gender gap implications in the 1982 election to a meeting of the American Association for Public Opinion Research. Among other findings, Arthur Miller and Oksana Malunchak reported that 1982 gender-based partisan differences were most striking in open districts. With no incumbency influence, these districts provided a unique laboratory for comparisons.

The 1980 and 1982 polls also indicated the existence of a "marriage gap"—unmarried voters of either gender were more inclined to favor Democratic candidates over Republican candidates. The *New York Times* reported that single voters of both sexes favored Democrats over Republicans in contests for the House of Representatives by 11 points more than married voters.

ATTITUDES ABOUT CANDIDATES, ISSUES AND EVENTS

Women voters (as well as men) respond to a variety of political influences besides partisan preferences. A look at the interplay of some of these attitudes provides a more comprehensive picture of the voting behavior of women.

Women, like men, respond to candidates according to their feelings about the candidates' personalities and characters as well as their stands on issues. For example, researchers of the 1952 election found that women favored the Republican candidate, Dwight Eisenhower, more than men largely because of their concern about the Korean war and its effect on inflation and employment. Women apparently saw Eisenhower as a person more able to extricate the United States from the Korean war.[3]

[3]This obvious difference in women's candidate preferences prompted pollster Louis Harris to write a prescient comment about the 1952 election: "The implication of this newfound independence among women can have a profound effect on the future of American politics. It raises the real possibility that in the future there will in fact be a 'women's vote' quite separate from the men's [vote]."

Voters' assessments of candidates are complex, drawing on a variety of predispositions. Harvard scholar Ethel Klein, a speaker at the LWVEF Conference on the Women's Vote, described poll data showing that women who preferred George McGovern in 1972 on the basis of his stand on women's issues were more likely to vote for him than were men who favored these issues. This advantage was offset, however, by the less favorable perceptions women had about McGovern as a candidate and leader. Lansing also suggested that women's opinions on important public policy views can explain their candidate preferences, at least in part. For example, early in the 1960 campaign, women preferred Nixon to Kennedy, presumably because they felt more comfortable with him due to his greater international experience at the time. After the campaign was over, however, women voted for Kennedy in the same proportion as men.

Since 1952, scholars using survey research at the University of Michigan have studied voter participation and voter preferences on issues in presidential elections. Numerous opinion polls such as those conducted by Gallup, Roper and Harris, as well as by the media, also help to illustrate how voters feel about issues and how they make political choices. For many years, the conventional wisdom was that women's opinions on issues did not differ appreciably from men's. However, on closer examination this assumption does not hold up. Research data on how women felt about issues in the early years of their enfranchisement are scarce. Generally speaking, women supported peace and social and economic welfare issues, but the systematic collection of information about women's preferences really did not begin until the post-World War II period. But then, some interesting findings emerged.

Baxter and Lansing pointed out that even in the 1950s, women held different positions from men on some issues and, most consistently, on the issue of war and peace. In fact, women historically have been more likely than men to oppose heavy military commitments and aggressive policies. They have been more likely to be critical of U.S. involvement in wars, more likely to support U.S. withdrawals from wars and generally more apprehensive about U.S. involvement in war from World War II to Korea, Viet Nam, Cambodia and other more recent threats to world peace. Women's preferences for peace are more prominent among younger, more highly educated women. (Of course, none of this is to imply that men are pro-violence or pro-war; it means only that women as a group tend to be more negative about violence and aggression than men.)

By the 1970s, many women had developed distinct feminist issue preferences, but the nature of the political campaigns and the candidates prevented large numbers of women from making an electoral choice based on these issue preferences because candidates did not address these points in the campaigns. Instead of issue preferences, Ethel Klein found that campaign symbolism and candidate impressions were the important voting influences for women in both 1972 and 1976.

The 1980 election showed a continued trend for women to be more "pro-peace" than men, in general, and to assess candidates at least partly on the basis of this issue preference. Baxter and Lansing cite a wide range of 1980 opinion polls to support their contention that the "peace/war issue

had more influence on women than on men in 1980." But this was not the only issue on which men and women differed in the campaign.

Economic issues also divided men and women in 1980. At the LWVEF Conference, Lansing pointed to the fact that women were more inclined to favor social welfare spending than men, and to feel, by 8 percentage points more than men, that their financial condition had worsened over the period of a year. In a paper presented at a political science conference, political scientist Celinda Lake wrote that "while men were more concerned about, had more information on, and based judgments more on big government and economic issues—both of which clearly favored Reagan—women turned more to social issues which at least relatively favored Carter." Lake suggested that defense spending, the economy and social welfare issues were important campaign issues to women.

In addition, the presidential candidates in 1980 clearly differed on "women's issues." Carter supported the ERA and Reagan opposed it. Carter opposed an anti-abortion constitutional amendment while Reagan favored it. Carter seemed more comfortable with the changing role of women, while Reagan campaigned on traditional family values. Yet polls seemed to indicate that it was not "women's issues" *per se* that caused the marked division between women and men voters in 1980. For example, men and women both responded to questions concerning the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) similarly: about 60 percent of both genders supported the proposed amendment. But according to Ethel Klein, 60 percent of women who supported the ERA were likely to vote for Carter compared to 51 percent of men who supported the amendment. Moreover, the sex difference in the relation between support for women's issues and the actual voting decision was even greater among ERA supporters who felt Carter was better on women's issues. A similar pattern was noted on the issue of abortion. Among men and women voters who disapproved of ERA, there was not an appreciable gender difference.

Unlike women's issues, however, environmental issues clearly divided men's and women's voting preferences in 1980. Polls confirmed the high level of importance women placed on protecting the environment. Women consistently were more likely to oppose off-shore drilling and construction of nuclear power plants and generally were more supportive of a range of environmental issues. These differences in issue stances seemed to be replicated in voting patterns.

It is unclear whether or not the personal qualities of candidates Reagan and Carter were factors in the 1980 gender gap, since men and women seemed cool to *both* candidates during the campaign period. In preelection surveys designed to pinpoint the public's perception of the candidates' personal qualities, President Jimmy Carter was described as a "basically good man, but one whose leadership skills were in doubt." Candidate Ronald Reagan seemed to fare a little better. Even after the long primary season, many voters surveyed seemed uncertain about Reagan's personal qualities; others gave him low marks on competence (cited in Baxter and Lansing, p. 189).

On the question of Carter's handling of the presidency, an issue that candidate Reagan stressed in the campaign, both women and men rated

Dr. Marjorie Lansing of Eastern Michigan University helped LWVEF conference participants put the women's vote in perspective by drawing on her research into the changing voting patterns for women and men since 1952. Lansing coauthored Women and Politics: The Visible Majority, *with Sandra Baxter.*

President Carter poorly, although fewer women (53%) disapproved than men (59%), according to University of Michigan surveys.

The results of 1980 exit polls conducted by the media and surveys conducted by scholars revealed a clear difference between men and women in their votes for president. According to conference speaker Kathleen Frankovic of CBS, the CBS News/*New York Times* 1980 poll showed both women and men preferred Ronald Reagan to Jimmy Carter, women by a narrow margin of 47 percent to 45 percent and men by a much sharper difference of 55 percent to 36 percent. The University of Michigan data used by Baxter and Lansing show similar results. Reagan received 47 percent of women's votes compared to 55 percent of the men, while 42 percent of women supported Carter compared to 36 percent of the men. Though the gender differences did not affect the outcome of the election, they set the stage for the 1982 election and the media's attention to the gender gap.

During the 1982 campaign period, the CBS/*New York Times* polls indicated that women were much less supportive of President Reagan's policies and performance than men (see Table 1) and that women were more inclined than men to elect Democrats to Congress (see Table 2). As the congressional campaign progressed, polling experts studied the gender gap and what it might portend for the 1982 election. There was speculation as to whether it was "real," whether it would affect any races and what it would be in the future.

Kathleen Frankovic concluded from examining the 1982 CBS News/*New York Times* election day exit poll that the gender gap was "statistically real." The poll showed that 57 percent of women voters cast their ballots for Democratic candidates for the House of Representatives compared with 53 percent of the men voters. The gender gap in this survey showed up most clearly in the Midwest.

Women voters in general had a more pessimistic view of the economy than men voters and were less likely to think they had been helped by the

TABLE 1

Gender Differences in Assessing Presidential Policies and Performance
(by percent)

	Sept. 1983		June 1983		Jan. 1983		May 1982		Jan. 1982	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling his job as President?										
APPROVE	53	39	57	39	47	35	49	39	54	44
DISAPPROVE	38	43	33	44	44	50	38	48	34	41
Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling foreign policy?										
APPROVE	45	32	53	35	47	32	51	36	56	49
DISAPPROVE	45	49	32	40	33	43	34	42	31	31
How about the economy? Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling the economy?										
APPROVE	50	39	60	39	42	28	42	33	46	39
DISAPPROVE	44	48	34	50	50	61	49	58	46	50
Whatever its effect on you, do you think the economic program has helped or hurt the country's economy?										
HELPED			56	42	33	22	25	18	33	31
HURT			35	42	57	63	54	62	52	50
TOO EARLY TO TELL (VOL.)			3	5	3	4	8	8	7	6

Source: CBS News/*New York Times* Poll. Used by permission.

TABLE 2

Women, Men and Partisan Inclination in the 1982 Elections
(by percent)

PRE-ELECTION OPINION

Do you think the country should elect more Republicans to Congress, or more Democrats to Congress?	Jan. 1982		May 1982	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
MORE REPUBLICANS	27	19	24	20
MORE DEMOCRATS	32	34	31	38

If the 1982 elections for U.S. House of Representatives were being held today, would you vote for the Republican candidate or the Democratic candidate in your district? (IF UNDECIDED) Which way do you lean as of today—towards the Republican candidate or towards the Democratic candidate?	Oct. 1982	
	MEN	WOMEN
REPUBLICAN	41	35
DEMOCRATIC	51	53

EXIT POLLS

Vote in 1982 elections for U.S. House of Representatives	*Overall*		*Democratic Incumbent Districts*		*Republican Incumbent Districts*		*Open Seats*	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
REPUBLICAN	44	40	33	32	54	47	47	42
DEMOCRATIC	53	57	63	64	43	50	51	54

Source: CBS News/*New York Times* Polls. Used by permission. Election Day and October 1982 percentages based on opposed House districts only.

Dr. Kathleen Frankovic of CBS News reported that her analysis of 1982 exit poll data clearly indicated a "statistically real" gender gap.

Administration's economic program. In addition, they had a less favorable view of Reagan's conduct of the presidency.

The final results showed that the gender gap had an effect in some races but not in others. In Texas, Democrat Mark White's upset victory in the governor's race was credited largely to the support of women voters. Their preponderance in the electorate and their overwhelming support of Democrat White overcame a five-point preference among men for the Republican candidate.

In the New York governor's race, Democrat Mario Cuomo's edge among women voters was large enough to overcome his opponent's lead among men. Similar statistics were reported in the New Jersey Senate race, where, in a different twist, Democrat Frank Lautenberg campaigned with the endorsement of the National Organization of Women and outpolled Millicent Fenwick, a popular Republican member of the House of Representatives.

Simply comparing the final tallies of men's and women's votes may gloss over the effects of candidates' campaign tactics. For example, in Arkansas, Democrat Bill Clinton's preelection polls indicated that while he was benefitting from the female half of a significant gender gap, he was trailing among *male* voters. His campaign responded by targeting men voters with a series of male-oriented television commercials aired during sports broadcasts and other male-oriented programs. On election day, both women and men supported Clinton by a margin of 9–12 percentage points. While a cursory analysis of the results would not reveal a gender gap, it was in fact an important factor in the way the campaign was conducted.

THE WOMEN'S VOTE: LOOKING AHEAD

Two major questions for observers of American electoral politics is whether the gender gap is part of a long-term trend and whether it will continue to be important. Key scholars have answered these questions in the affirmative. Kathleen Frankovic reported to the LWVEF Conference: "The differences in the 1982 elections suggest the emergence of long-term divisions between men and women in political behavior." Harvard scholar Ethel Klein stated: "The gender gap is rooted in long-term demographic trends. . . ." Marjorie Lansing pointed out: "The differences in [male/female] attitudes are anchored in long-run demographic variables." What then, do these conclusions mean for the future?

THE WOMEN'S POLICY AGENDA

Ethel Klein addressed some of these questions at the LWVEF Conference on the Women's Vote. Since there is general agreement that historical evidence shows that a gender gap does exist, the next question must be: What lies ahead? The gender gap is more than just a difference in voter turnout levels or differences in the level of support for certain candidates, parties or policy positions by men and women. What has become apparent, says Klein, is that women tend to calculate their voting decisions according to a multi-issue policy agenda which differs from that used by men and which cuts across group lines. The degree of importance of certain issues varies among voters. That, to Klein, is what makes the gender gap important and durable. Different campaigns and different elections will trigger responses based on different issues. What the gender gap means is that women have identifiable interests that they are willing to translate into votes.

This policy agenda shared by women cuts across all divisions of women by race, education and age, although different groups may place more weight on some issues than others. Professor Marianne Githens of Goucher College has surveyed recent studies in this field and concluded that the women's agenda "appears as though it is a configuration of peace, the environment, Reaganomics, social issues and a general sense of fair play that distinguishes women's preferences and opinions from those of men."

Specific "women's issues" have been shown to be important factors in combination with the other issues. These issues, in Klein's view, seem to fall into two dimensions: first, the national welfare, i.e., what is best for the society as a whole; second, self-interest, i.e., what is best for women. Peace and the environment clearly fall into the first dimension, while economic issues can be included in both. Women's support for social welfare programs has traditionally been a considered a "compassionate" interest in the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged; however, as

women have become more aware that many of them *are* poor and disadvantaged, economic issues have become a matter of self-interest as well. Such "women's issues" as economic discrimination against women, abortion rights and support for the ERA also fall into the self-interest category.

A NEW POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The increased dimension of self-interest, combined with demographic trends and new role perceptions affecting the lives of women, helps to define and explain the gender gap. A majority of women have joined the work force; a majority of the nation's poor are women. Changes in lifestyle and family structure have affected how women see themselves. Such large-scale forces have brought women into a new relationship with the world of politics. As Virginia Sapiro points out in *The Political Integration of Women*, women no longer stand at the margin but are gradually becoming integrated into the mainstream of political life.

Klein believes that long-term demographic trends have redefined what it means to be a woman in the United States in the 1980s. Over time, traditional roles that constrained the participation of women in politics disappeared as women developed a political consciousness. In discussing this process, both Klein and Lansing stressed the significance of the fight for the ERA, through which women have become more aware of their own interests and have begun to look to the political arena to address them. And as women have become informed about discrimination and injustices directed against them, they have developed a new unity in the realization that other women faced similar problems.

Women also have gained political skills and experience in the fight for ERA, whether as observers or participants. Many women have become familiar with the voting records of their state legislators. They have learned lobbying and electioneering techniques and have gained new confidence in their ability to communicate their concerns to public officials.

The Reagan campaign and administration have been other important factors in the recent political education of women. Reagan has stirred feminist interests by opposing ERA, abortion and government spending for social programs while supporting traditional goals and values for women.

These political and historical trends have meant that, in recent years, more women have been voting, running for office or serving in other community leadership roles. As Virginia Sapiro put it in her book, "Women as a group and women as individuals are being transformed—and indeed are transforming themselves—into citizen members of the political community."

CONTINUING TRENDS

Writing in September 1983, after attending a conference of political

Dr. Ethel Klein of Harvard University told conference participants that the knowledge that women have identifiable interests which they are willing to translate into votes can help in the development of a "language of political empowerment" for women.

scientists, columnist David Broder summarized a host of research papers on the gender gap with the statement that it "looks more and more like a deeply rooted trend."

The evidence has in fact led most observers to the conclusion that the gender gap is here to stay even though it may not always be evident in specific election results. Frankovic bases her belief that the gender gap will continue beyond the 1984 election on the continuing difference between the way men and women make election choices, a trend that became apparent in the 1980 election, was again reflected in 1982 and is still showing up in recent polls on approval rates for the Reagan presidency. For example, in a September 1983 *Washington Post*/ABC News Poll, women were distinctly less approving than men of the policies of the current Administration. Women were 15 percentage points more disapproving than men of the way economic matters were being handled and 10 percentage points more critical about the handling of cuts in social programs. In this poll, women gave the President an approval rating that was 12 percentage points lower than that of men. The CBS/*New York Times* poll showed similar gender differences to the *Washington Post*/ABC poll for 1983 (see Table 1).

Miller and Malanchuk note that "emerging gender differences certainly appear to be associated with shifting patterns of party identification, thereby implying that they will be lasting." They believe that the reasons that women have become more Democratic (see previous section) also explain the gender gap and they find these reasons "deeply rooted in long-term socialization practices that define the moral imperatives differently for men and women."

At the LWVEF Conference, Lansing predicted that the gender gap in the voting patterns of men and women will continue in future elections unless the following happen: candidates come to agree on policy issues important to women, there is real progress on peace and related issues, *and* there are changes in women's perceptions about their economic well-being.

THE RESEARCH AGENDA

As scholars of women's voting behavior look to the future, they see the need for research that both supplements the information in hand and answers important new questions. Research on women and politics is still at the exploratory stage so that more information is needed in order to reach the next stage of building explanatory theory. For example, Lansing advocates major investigation into the "intensity of political involvement among black women." Participants at the Conference on the Women's Vote echoed this request for more study about minority women and stressed the need to broaden the scope of research to include all groups of women. Lansing also called for more information about the relationship between the strength of the political parties and the numbers and success of women candidates.

University of Michigan scholar Barbara Farah, noting that those who vote in primary elections tend to be more active and better informed than the electorate in general elections, stressed the need for more research on how women determine their choices in those elections and on how more women can be motivated to participate in primaries. Drawing on her research experience from the 1982 Women USA Fund registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns in six states, Farah concluded that women *are* able to identify which candidates are more able to deal with issues of importance to women.

Klein advocated more sophisticated research on why women think about politics in a way different from men, and Farah emphasized the lack of research on how women make up their minds on how to vote. This kind of knowledge, Klein observed, would lead to the development of a "new language of political empowerment" to help women make connections between what they want and need and how they can use the political system to meet those needs.

Researchers and observers alike recognize the need for comparability of data in the study of the women's vote. Since different scholars have asked different questions, and different sets of issues have been surveyed, it has been difficult to draw broad conclusions. Some basic guidelines should be agreed upon and data should be pooled as researchers look to the future. Important questions that probe public opinion on issues of special interest to women should be added to standard polls and national surveys.

Marianne Githens, political science professor at Goucher College, has looked at the way political science has approached the study of women and politics and called for some basic changes. In her opinion, the discipline has long tended to trivialize gender-related research by treating it as a "side-road," a study of deviance from the male standard. Women's political behavior has been studied using the behavior of men (specifically, in the United States, white men) as the norm and defining political activity in relation to what men do in the political arena. "What is now needed," Githens concludes, "is a new research agenda focusing on what women define as political and what they see as appropriate political behavior within this context."

AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

The gender gap exists; it is based on an issue agenda distinct for women; it is unlikely to be a short-lived phenomenon. The women's movement, according to Marjorie Lansing, is looking forward to a third stage after the struggle for suffrage and the era of activism that ended inconclusively with the defeat of the ERA in 1982. "What began as a special interest protest has emerged into a cohesive group, loosely organized, highly individualistic and composed of women bearing right and left ideologies. The third wave of the women's movement will attempt to secure equal human rights, including full participation in the political system."

Klein recognizes that women activists are now in a transition period, moving from a time of confrontation into a period of participation in electoral politics. She estimates that active, attentive feminists—men, women, Republicans and Democrats favorable to women's issues—now make up about 20 percent of the electorate. Republican women have recently been more vocal in summoning their party to pay attention to the concerns of women; the party is responding by stressing women's issues in training sessions for candidates and by focusing on such issues as education.

Members of Congress Claudine Schneider (R RI) and Barbara Kennelly (D CT), who addressed the participants at the Conference on the Women's Vote, urged women to take advantage of the new awareness of the women's vote to achieve action on the issues women care about. Schneider stressed the importance of campaigns and organizations reaching the "nonjoiners," to inform them about the issues and to get them out to vote so that women can use the enormous potential of the women's vote to elect responsive officials.

Barbara Farah stressed the importance of participation by women in primary elections and other candidate selection processes; for at that

Dorothy S. Ridings (right), chair of the League of Women Voters Education Fund, introduces Rep. Barbara Kennelly (D CT), who gave conferees an inside view on the impact of the women's vote on the election process and on issues before Congress.

stage of the process, small numbers of votes can make crucial differences. Research also indicates that voters in primary elections are much more likely to vote in general elections.

The Baxter-Lansing 1983 edition of *Women and Politics: The Visible Majority* takes up the call for action: "With their strength in numbers, leadership experience, and organizational skills, women now have the best opportunity in the sixty years since suffrage to exercise political clout. Their clout is especially powerful in the closely balanced electoral system of the United States. When winning margins are smaller, a well-organized voting bloc can often determine election outcomes, as women demonstrated in 1982."

The next step, then, is to bring as many women as possible into the political process, through education, registration and get-out-the-vote drives and grass-roots organization. Both political parties seemed well aware of gender gap implications going into the 1984 presidential campaign. The media began devoting extensive coverage of both gender-related issues and women's voter registration plans as early as the fall of 1983.

Women's organizations continue to work toward encouraging more women to register and vote. The Women's Roundtable, a cooperative effort of more than 40 organizations committed to women's issues, showed significant staying power in the cause of women voting. This group of organization leaders began meeting in the summer of 1982 to plan strategies to increase the electoral participation of women (leaders of the Women's Roundtable largely made up the participants at the 1983 LWVEF Conference on the Women's Vote.) In the spring of 1983 this group made a commitment that each organization in the Roundtable would do its utmost to register its own members and get them out to vote and to reach other women as well, to bring them fully into the electoral process. Using a variety of techniques, groups planned to emphasize voter education, registration drives, and get-out-the-vote campaigns. Leaders of these organizations pledged that women will be equal participants with men in voting and determining policies that affect their lives.

Beyond that, women will continue to use their new political skills and clout to elect women to office. Ruth Mandel, director of the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers University, pointed out to the Women's Vote Conference that, although women now make up only about 10 percent of elected officials in this country, those women officeholders are making an important difference.

In Marjorie Lansing's words at the conclusion of the Conference on the Women's Vote: "We will not go back to the *status quo ante*, and women will continue to strive. . . to become cosigners of the social contract."

SCHOLARS AND POLLING EXPERTS WHO SPOKE AT THE LWVEF CONFERENCE ON THE WOMEN'S VOTE

Marjorie Lansing, Ph.D., Eastern Michigan University
Kathleen Frankovic, Ph.D., CBS News
Barbara Farah, Ph.D., University of Michigan
Dotty Lynch, Lynch Research Inc.
Wilma Goldstein, Campaign Fund for Republican Women
Ethel Klein, Ph.D., Harvard University

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